

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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AUSTIN BILL WILL MAKE HUMAN TRAFFICKING A FELONY IN INDIANA

INDIANAPOLIS -- House Bill 1825, legislation authored by State Rep. Terri Austin (D-Anderson), unanimously passed out of the House Committee on Courts and Criminal Code on Wednesday. The bill addresses human and sexual trafficking and the penalties people convicted of these crimes will receive under Indiana law.

The scope of the crimes this bill addresses is fairly wide:

Anyone who knowingly recruits, harbors, or transports another person for the purpose of forcing that person into marriage, labor or involuntary servitude is guilty of a Class B felony.

Anyone who intentionally sells or transfers the custody of a minor for the purpose of prostitution commits a Class B felony.

If a person pays for an individual who has been forced into any of the above situations, he or she is also guilty of a Class B felony.

At this moment in the United States, there are over 150,000 victims of human or sexual trafficking from 49 different countries. Each year, 17,000 new victims are brought to the United States.

This bill will also require international matchmaking organizations to provide criminal history information and a marital history declaration on any potential American spouse. Any violation of this will be a Class C misdemeanor.

Human and sexual trafficking has already affected Indiana. Mary Jo Lee of Alternatives, Inc., a domestic violence shelter in Madison County, told the stories of a Hispanic woman who was purchased by her American husband when she was only 13 years old. She gave birth to a son when she was 16 and was again pregnant when she was 19. Her husband frequently raped and beat her. She and her son had not been seen outside of the home in 3 years. The husband controlled them both by withholding food from them. It was only when her neighbors heard her screaming that the police were called and she was taken to Alternatives, Inc.

"You might think that, because we live in Indiana, nothing like human and sexual trafficking can occur," said Austin. "But in the last year, the Indiana Coalition against Domestic Violence has dealt with 10 women who were "mail-order brides" that were beaten by their husbands. Seven of these women were under the age of 18 and already had children. The legislature can no longer ignore this problem. We must do something now before it gets worse."

House Bill 1825 will now move to the full House for further consideration.